

Janis Kozlowski: Well I have some pictures here [*see picture 1 of two men in winter gear*] that you had mailed to me and I wanted to ask you some questions about them and see what you remember about them.

John Pletcher: These two young fellas I've been trying to get in touch with either one of them and I haven't been successful. I can't recall the names of them, but they were younger pilots than me. They had come up probably in about 1942, because I was here [*clarification – Alaska*] until about February of '43 when I left, and they had been here quite a little while. Those pictures will give you an idea of what kind of stuff we were wearing. We were issued winter flying clothes and other winter clothing and boots. The boots that these boys are wearing they are not totally waterproof. They are a flying boot but they are fleece lined, winter boot. This one boy is in sheepskin jacket and that was typical of the jackets that the crew members were wearing, the gunners and engineers and people like that. And we were wearing those out in the Aleutian Islands.

Janis Kozlowski: And were those clothes warm enough to keep you for all the hours that you flew?

John Pletcher: Well, yeah, when we were flying, the B-26 had a very good heater system and you could fly in your short sleeves if you wanted to turn the heaters up. But I required my crew members to all fly with their winter flying suits on and the reason for that was that if we were forced down or forced to abandon the airplane for any reason if they didn't have that gear on when they left the airplane they would, they just wouldn't survive. So, I'd turn the heat off and make them wear those heavy clothes so they'd be prepared if they had to survive outside the airplane. I don't know what the other airplane commanders did, but I was the flight commander down in the Aleutians and that's what I had my guys all do was to wear their winter flying equipment. I tried to impress on them the fact that, you didn't know when you might have an airplane problem or you might get shot up or something and either have to bail out or you might have to crash land someplace and if you were in your shirt sleeves, why, you just weren't going to make it.

Janis Kozlowski: Sounds like smart advice.

John Pletcher: Yeah, well [*laughter*] we did things from a practical standpoint.

In that picture you have there is a picture of a B-26 [*picture 2 of a B-26 with engine covers on*]. Now, the B-26s that we had in Alaska were out of the first 200 B-26s built by Martin, and these airplanes would have been built in Baltimore, because Martin didn't have the Omaha plant open at the time these were built. And these were known by the designation of B-26 - no dash A, B or C. Later, after this run, and I don't know how many more they built out of this design, but the B and C models had wings that were a little bit longer and tail surfaces that were a little bit larger and the engines were rated for a little bit more horsepower. The engines on these early models were rated at 1850 hp and I think the B and C were rated at about 1925 to 2000. Other than that the airplanes basically were the same.

The later models they added on a lot of guns, package guns on the side, 50 caliber machine guns, and these were forward firing guns. These were used in Europe and I guess some in the South Pacific, I'm not sure about the South Pacific because I wasn't there. I know the South Pacific had some of the original airplanes out of the first 200, straight B-26s. But I believe that they started sending B-25s to the South Pacific and I don't think very many B-26s actually got used in the South Pacific, but that part I wouldn't be sure about.